

Reagan Sees 'Fiction' in Book on C.I.A. Chief

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30 — President Reagan said today that "an awful lot of fiction" had been written about William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence for most of Mr. Reagan's Presidency.

Mr. Reagan's comments were his first public reaction to a book by Bob Woodward of The Washington Post, "Vell: The Secret Wars of the C.I.A." The book recounts many undercover intelligence activities undertaken in the President's term and quotes some observations by Mr. Casey that are critical of Mr. Reagan. Mr. Casey, who

resigned in January, died of pneumonia in May after brain surgery.

Marlin Fitzwater, the President's spokesman, said the President had not actually read the book but was responding to accounts he had read in the newspapers or seen on television.

The President's brief statements posed a public relations problem for his aides. They have been carefully withholding all comment on Mr. Woodward's book since excerpts started to appear in newspapers and news magazines last weekend, in the hope that the furor would soon abate.

But when Mr. Reagan was pressed by reporters for his views at a photo

session in the White House this morning, he answered several questions.

The main one concerned Mr. Woodward's account of a deathbed interview with Mr. Casey. According to the book, the author asked Mr. Casey if he had known that profits from the sale of arms to Iran had been channelled to the Nicaraguan rebels. Mr. Casey nodded yes, Mr. Woodward wrote.

'An Awful Lot of Fiction'

"I think," the President said, "that there's an awful lot of fiction about a man who was unable to communicate at all, and is now being quoted as if he was doing nothing but talk his head

off."

Mr. Woodward says his conversation with Mr. Casey lasted four minutes and consisted of 19 words.

Mr. Fitzwater said earlier this week that Mr. Reagan wanted to talk to Mr. Casey by telephone after the intelligence chief entered the hospital. But Mr. Casey's doctors said he was never well enough to accept such a call.

Mr. Casey's widow, Sophia, has denied that Mr. Woodward had interviewed her husband in the hospital.

The second major question concerned an assertion by Mr. Woodward that Mr. Casey secured aid from Saudi Arabia to finance an anti-terrorist squad. That squad was blamed for a bomb attack on a Lebanese Shiite leader, Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah. Mr. Fadlallah escaped harm in the attack, but 80 others died.

Mr. Reagan confirmed today that he had signed a document authorizing formation of the anti-terrorist squad. However, he said, "It was nothing but that we were all approving a plan requested of us by the Government of Beirut — of Lebanon, I should say — to help them in counter-terrorism."

He added: "Never would I sign anything that would authorize an assassination. I never have, and I never will, and I didn't."

Concern Over Portrayal

Asked if Mr. Casey might have conducted intelligence operations without his knowledge, Mr. Reagan said, "Not that I know of."

A senior White House official explained later that in branding Mr. Woodward's book "fiction," the President was also referring to the book's

account of Mr. Reagan's condition immediately after he was shot in March 1981. Mr. Casey's description of those days, as related by Mr. Woodward, depicted an enfeebled President who had to breathe through a respirator and was much sicker than the public knew.

"The whole notion that the President was ever incapacitated is just wrong," the official said.

The White House is concerned about that aspect of the book, the aide said, because it casts doubt on Mr. Reagan's vigor. Similarly, the White House was concerned about a passage in the book in which Mr. Casey was quoted as saying the President was "uninterested" in his job. "Casey continued to be struck by the overall passivity of the President," Mr. Woodward wrote, "passivity about his job and about his approach to life."

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